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ADVICE TO THE YOUNG.

A Sermon,

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Ecclesiastes xii. 1.—*"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them."*

There are favourable times and seasons for the acquisition of virtue and religion; and we are deeply interested in, and solemnly bound to improve them. If these are permitted to elapse without producing their appropriate fruit, the peculiar facilities of moral cultivation which they present, can never be recovered. The past is utterly beyond our control; and no amount of diligence and zeal will enable us to profit by opportunities which are swallowed up in the ocean of eternity. The morning of our days is best adapted to the business of saving the soul; and when we consider how much is to be accomplished before we reach the full measure of Christian perfection, there is but too just ground to apprehend, that unless we begin early the work of grace, we shall either never begin it at all, or if we do, we shall fail in prosecuting it to the desired consummation. Such is the constitution of the human mind, that the difficulty of adopting devout principles, and a holy course of action, increases every hour it is deferred. This state of things is no disparagement to the freeness and efficacy of the gospel. The scheme of salvation is fitted to the nature of man, and the operations of grace are consistent with his moral agency. The Son of God, in turning sinners from their iniquities, does not employ an instrumentality of constraint. His gracious purposes are

often defeated by the blindness and obstinacy of transgressors. He is able to "save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him," but he never promised, or intended to save the habitual profligate at the same expense of toil and exertion, which must be used by the individual, who has never allowed his appetites and passions to plunge him into scandalous excess. A sincere and honest desire of walking in the ways of godliness, at whatever period of life, or after whatever aggravations of guilt, it may arise in the soul, will most assuredly be gratified; but nevertheless it cannot be questioned, that they, who answer the call of the gospel before their natural corruptions have attained the gigantic strength and the deep tinged pollution of a practical development, secure to themselves a special and priceless blessing. The delay of a few, or even of many years, may not prove utterly ruinous—may not absolutely exclude the presumptuous abuser of God's forbearance from the kingdom of heaven; but it will without doubt diminish the lustre of his crown, and the glory of his triumph:—if it does not harden his mind to the degree which shuts him up under incurable reprobation, it will most certainly prevent the attainment of those high excellencies and pre-eminent rewards, to which he might otherwise have successfully aspired.

The comparative facility in the period of youth of subduing the natural aversion of the mind to religious pursuits; the painful state of living without God in the world, and the augmenting danger every moment this state continues, of an entire severance from the hopes of the gospel—these are arguments most powerful and conclusive to awaken the young from the delusions of levity, and to show them the high importance of immediately giving their hearts to God. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." There are many considerations which demonstrate the wisdom of adopting the course here recommended by Solomon; and I propose on the present occasion, briefly to illustrate some of them.

In the outset of life, the faculties of conscience perceive with

accuracy the distinctions between right and wrong. Vice appears in all its hatefulness and deformity, Virtue in all its loveliness and beauty. When Religion is faithfully portrayed, her aspect is perfectly amiable, irresistibly charming in the eyes of ingenuous and unsophisticated youth. She is clothed with a thousand attractions, which the coldness and apathy of dissolute or dissipated, or care-worn manhood, can neither discern nor appreciate. To be loved, she requires only to be seen; but the vision of the sensual and the worldly, has become dim and indistinct, and therefore, they are unable to estimate her beauties: they know her not, her lineaments are unfamiliar to them, she passes by them unheeded;—although surrounded by a halo of splendour, attractive and glorious to the virtuous and the faithful, she is beheld with terror and disgust by the unbelieving and the corrupt. Her countenance beams with sweet contentment, and peaceful joy; she dispenses heavenly gifts wherever she sojourns; no one who has given her entertainment can cease to remember the elevated delights of her holy converse. All the virtues march in her train; all the charities are her companions; her presence heightens and sanctifies every lawful and salutary gratification; she denies her votaries no indulgence which is not immediately or remotely injurious to themselves; health, peace and competence are her handmaids in this world, and glory, honour and immortality await her in eternity. Such, my youthful hearers, is the interesting being who solicits your friendship, and entreats you to receive her as a constant guest, and an inseparable associate. I am persuaded the rectitude of your moral perceptions will not permit you to regard with contempt or indifference, the favours which she, and she only is commissioned and entitled to bestow. You have not yet suppressed the sentiments of gratitude and love towards the Father of your spirits, which his relation to you as a creator, a guardian and a protector, is calculated to inspire; you surely will not refuse the sacrifice of thanksgiving when you have no other return to make for his inestimable benefits; you will, it is to be hoped, show by a deep and an ardent devotion, that you still cherish the tenderness and susceptibility proper to your age; that you

set a just value upon the high and paramount duties, which religion inculcates; and that you are resolved to remember and to serve *Him*, whom it would argue the utmost baseness to *forget*, and the utmost folly to *disobey*. What a divine and attractive loveliness does religion confer on the young! and how vain are the elegance and accomplishments which she does not illustrate and adorn! How soon do external graces pall upon the beholder, when they are not enlivened and embellished by that sensibility of heart, which religion alone can create and sustain! The natural tenderness and the moral feeling which commonly inhabit the youthful bosom, are valuable gifts of God, and may be rendered greatly conducive to the future well-being of those who rightly use and cherish them. Dreadful indeed are the consequences of their extinction! How many are now languishing under disease and infamy, and dragging out a wretched existence in the haunts of misery and shame, who once felt every high and generous emotion, which delicacy and refinement inspire—who triumphed in the purity and integrity of their sentiments, and flattered themselves that they were destined to run an uninterrupted career of uprightness and honour. What occasioned the disappointment of these bright anticipations? Why is it that so many who start in the race of life with the fairest promise of success, suddenly remit their exertions, and turn aside into the paths of ruin and disgrace? This is the cause—they do not remember their Creator, they do not look to him for ability to accomplish their enterprises, and protection from the snares and corruptions of the world. Unguarded by the grace of God, their hearts soon become a prey to the artifices of Satan, and the seductions of sense. Intercourse with the world, where religion does not interpose to neutralize the poison which it diffuses, soon mars and defaces the amiable softness, and the comparative innocence of the youthful heart. Deception and treachery beget fearfulness and distrust. The individual who has been the victim of misplaced confidence, is apt to suspect the whole of his species. Benevolence and sympathy are banished; the sources of kindly feeling are dried up; and his soul is left in the uncontrolled possession of stern selfish-

ness or bitter misanthropy. Thus does the detection of baseness in others, produce the most baleful and corrupting effects upon the hearts of those who are not fortified by religion. Success in their vocation generally accomplishes a most disastrous change in the characters of those who have not learnt to remember their Creator. A youth enters on the public stage, animated with a generous desire to administer by his exertions, to the satisfaction and joy of a father's or a mother's breast, his soul swells with rapture in contemplating the endearing relations of brother, sister, friend; he thinks of his own welfare, without permitting himself to forget that of others; he seems to live chiefly to communicate pleasure, and disdains gratifications which would interfere with the rights, or interrupt the enjoyments of his fellow men:—but suddenly the scene is changed; he reaps an abundant harvest in the field of riches, or fame, or power; the tender claims of friendship and kindred are speedily forgotten, and all the virtuous and sacred affections which once swayed his bosom and constituted his happiness, are either chilled in the frozen atmosphere of avarice, or overwhelmed in the corroding flood of care, or steeled by the fiery contact of ambition. Where is now the dutiful son, the affectionate brother, the faithful friend? The toils of accumulating wealth, or the labours of sustaining himself in popular favour, absorb the whole of his time and thoughts. He advances with a steady, and it may be an unexpected facility towards the end of his wishes; but a more extensive prospect, a wider horizon presents itself; his desires expand, his aspirations become more lofty and magnificent; and after years of effort and anxiety, age steals upon him with unperceived approaches, and death finds him as far as ever from the goal of ease and contentment, to which he has constantly looked as the end and aim of all his plans and purposes. And what has such a person exchanged for the delightful sympathies which he has sacrificed upon the altar of ambition, or fame, or the love of gain? What has been the reward of his devotedness to the world? Perhaps a joyless sense of his own superiority, or the heartless flattery of dependents, or the empty plaudits of an unthinking multitude. Would not such a man eagerly barter his fame, or his populari-

ty, or his riches, or his power, to be restored to the amiable feelings of his youth—to experience again the pleasing emotions of benevolence, friendship and filial attachment? How small is the gratification to be derived from distinction! how poor are the enjoyments conferred by the exercise of power! how unsatisfying are the objects which wealth can procure! when the heart is a prey to pride, or coldness or gnawing care. But such a man has other grounds of uneasiness besides the present consequences of his absurd pursuits. He might endure the disappointment of failure in this life, if the chances against his being able to redeem his error with respect to the life to come, were not infinitely multiplied, and the hazard of his eternal perdition augmented to a degree inconceivably appalling. For it is a truth which cannot be too frequently repeated, or too earnestly enforced, that the destruction of our natural dispositions in the collisions of the world—and the substitution of the love of money, the love of fame, or the love of power instead of the native affections of the heart, render the work of salvation tenfold more difficult, create new obstructions in the path of immortality, sear the conscience against the impressions of religion, and leave a bare possibility, that the unfortunate subject of such unholy passions may be snatched as a brand from the burning, by a miracle of grace. I speak not this unadvisedly, my brethren. The assertion is sustained by the concurring testimony of scripture and universal experience. How hardly, says our Saviour, shall they that are rich enter into the kingdom of heaven! The love of money is the root of all evil. The effect which it produces on the heart is eminently pernicious. Of all the passions which inhabit the human bosom in its corrupted state, the love of money is the most pitiful, the most humiliating, the most contemptible. Some vices are horrible, others vile and shocking, others malignant and detestable—but the love of money excites in the beholder only the emotion of scorn. It provokes derision wherever it appears. It sinks the soul in which it obtains the pre-eminence to an awful point of degradation. It absorbs every thought, every faculty, every affection. Even the instinct of self-preservation has sometimes been almost extinguished by it. How can religion procure ad-

mission into a heart where this wretched spirit has taken up its abode? With God all things are possible, but in the ordinary course of human events, there is little ground to believe that a soul thoroughly imbued with the love of money, will ever become the subject of renewing grace. The love of power, the passion for celebrity, the desire of distinction, the affection for the pomps and vanities of life, all have their seeds in human nature, and acquire an overwhelming influence in the heart by the least indulgence. Let them be once rooted in the soul, let either of them become the ruling principle of the mind, and the reign of the prince of darkness is effectually confirmed. The idea of God is almost totally banished from the heart, which submits to the habitual domination of any unlawful passion or appetite. God must be supreme in our affections, or He will withdraw himself altogether. He will endure no rival, much less such a rival as the world, or the flesh. To remember him with gratitude, and love, and reverence, and admiration, the soul must be entirely untrammelled; it must not be fettered and restrained by the inordinate attachments and occupations of life. The preventing grace of God would never fail to effect the conversion of sinners, if it were not opposed and frustrated by themselves. In their endeavours to become virtuous and devout, the young have to contend only against natural propensities. However eager their inclination for unsanctified pleasure, however intense their susceptibility of ungodly excitement, they are not bound to their sins by the chains of habit. The voice of conscience in their souls is not drowned in the unbridled clamour of appetite and passion. They are thoughtless and unstable, and liable to be led astray by inward obliquity and outward allurement, but giddiness and instability, and the mere propensity to evil, are far less dangerous and criminal than that enmity to God and virtue which is fostered and embittered by habits of vice and irreligion. It must be obvious, that the principles of godliness can be introduced most easily and successfully into minds which are not pre-occupied by inveterate prejudices. At whatever time of life the seeds of religion are planted, their growth must be gradual; they cannot instantaneously bud and blossom, and bring forth fruit. When they are planted in

the youthful mind, it is reasonable to presume that their growth will be more rapid than when they are checked by factitious impediments. Accordingly, this conjecture we find to be verified by experience. The proposition is established by unquestionable facts, that habits of vice, or thoughtlessness, or irreligion, or worldliness multiply beyond calculation the obstacles in the way of salvation. Sinners brought to repentance in the meridian or decline of life, have infinitely more to accomplish before they obtain the crown, than if they had put their hand to the gospel plough in the seed time of their existence.

Although man comes into the world a child of wrath, and unacquainted with God, it is well known that all his evil propensities may be aggravated and extended. Every Christian who has commenced his course of penitence, after the world or the flesh had been enthroned in his heart, can trace to this cause many an arduous struggle, many a mortifying defeat which has hindered his advancement in godliness, and inspired him with a painful dread of ultimate discomfiture. The wounds and bruises which are inflicted in the service of sin, cannot be suddenly and completely cured. The recollection of the flesh-pots of Egypt, caused the Israelites to murmur under the privations of the wilderness. The sense of pleasure which accompanies the indulgence of sinful inclinations, is often remembered with a dangerous vividness by those believers who have been once enslaved to their appetites and passions. The imagination excited by such reminiscences, if not powerfully controlled from above, will inevitably hurry them back into guilt. Oh! how many who seemed to be entirely redeemed from the power of sin, have fallen victims to the fatal tenacity of unholy recollections! You who are yet unstained by gross pollutions, cannot be too grateful to God for the grace which has hitherto preserved you. Let the consideration of his goodness move you to a speedy and effectual dedication of yourselves to his service. For you may be assured that such a step will secure you from innumerable sorrows and humiliations.

The extent of the divine requisitions renders it highly expedient that the young should commence a life of religion as soon as they are capable of moral agency. The Saviour's character is the

standard and model by which Christians must try and form their own. The partakers of a sinful nature have no ground to expect that they shall rival his divine perfections; but they are nevertheless bound to keep his high excellence always in view, to follow after it, and to labour with unwearied energy and diligence, if by any means they may apprehend the utmost degree of holiness and virtue, to which fallen man may hope to attain during his sojourn here below. In whatever point of light, then, religion is presented to our consideration—whether as the instrument of peace and contentment here, or of glory and felicity in the eternal world—its design will be best answered and secured by an early reception into the heart. Nothing can be gained, and all may be lost by delay. Why should the presence of religion be dreaded by the sons of folly? Why do so many of you, my young friends, look upon her with suspicion and distrust? Has she ever proved herself an enemy to true, rational pleasure? Because she refuses her sanction to the indulgence of inclinations which natural conscience itself condemns, you think her harsh and severe in her requirements, stern and unjust in her censures. But let it even be admitted that she exercises a cruel and galling sway over her votaries—that all who enlist under her banner are destined to a life of toil and suffering, of gloom and disquietude: are not these evils much more tolerable than eternal agonies, undying despair, everlasting flames? But religion is in no respect what the profligate and the worldly would have you imagine. In the bosom where she dwells and exercises control, she diffuses a sweet calm, an inconceivable satisfaction. She adds lustre, and joy, and dignity, to the most elevated and prosperous condition. She confers cheerfulness and content upon the most lowly and depressed. She adapts herself to all times and circumstances. Often has she rendered supportable, afflictions and misfortunes which seemed utterly overwhelming. God is the *only* friend that never abandons us; the consolations of his presence the world can neither give nor take away. Behold that patient sufferer bowed down by poverty and distress, wounded to the quick by the scorn of the proud, and the neglect of pampered and selfish affluence. Whence does she derive support under her heavy

trials? How is she enabled to smile upon the desolation which sweeps over her earthly lot, and raise her eyes to the mercy-seat of Jehovah with a holy confidence and a divine hope? It is because religion has taught her to regard God as her steadfast friend, her sure stay, her infallible refuge. She can endure the cold civilities, the unfeeling condolence of her worldly associates, because she has other resources of consolation. She has by prayer and supplication, by contrition and faith, obtained an interest in the blood of Christ; and having thus become reconciled to God through his Son, she is at no loss for a supporter in the day of trouble. She has the assurance of his unfailing word, that He will never leave nor forsake those who serve, and fear, and trust him.

"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, in which thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them."

My young friends, let me entreat you to weigh the awful consequences which may result from your failure to consider and obey this inspired command. Few of you reflect on the tremendous issues which hang upon your first acts as responsible beings. Pleasure, profit, fame, ambition, present their allurements. You gaze enraptured on the illusive scene which they sketch before your awakened fancy, and anticipate at their suggestion, the accomplishment of the wildest wishes, the most unreasonable schemes. What foundation is there for these bright visions and flattering hopes? Is the world in truth the fairy land which you are ready to imagine? Will it really fulfil the glorious promises which it lavishes so profusely? Let sensuality speak. Behold the hoary debauchee, stretched on a bed of sickness, tortured with pain, and stung with remorse, afraid of death, and scarcely able to endure life, and inquire of him what profit he has had in the favours of the world? Enter the chamber of the sleeping drunkard, and witness the horrors of his morning dreams;—note the start of agony, the convulsive movement, by which he shakes off the oppressive slumber of intemperance: and what, suppose ye, will he say of the friendship of the world? The wise man who uttered the words of our text, was admirably qualified to pronounce definitively upon the

real, the intrinsic value of worldly possessions and pleasures. His field of enjoyment was the widest which was ever allotted to mortal man. His power was absolute, his wealth was boundless. He drained the cup of earthly joy to the very dregs. He sought out diligently every mode and means of gratification. What does Solomon say of the delights which he had so largely tasted? What is his opinion of their virtues, as means of felicity? He affirms, in the anguish of penitence and the bitterness of humiliation, that they are all empty and vain, impure and disquieting, big with misery, damnation, and despair.

My young friends, the choice of good or evil is now before you. You are now to determine what shall be the complexion of your fate, not only for the present life, but perhaps for eternity. It is, therefore, incumbent on you to pause, to inquire, to reflect. If you resolve wisely; if you believe the assurances, and embrace the offers of the gospel, you are safe, both for this world and the next. If you defer the important work of dedicating yourselves to God, and become immersed in the business, the frivolities, or the pleasures of the world, it is possible, (for the goodness of God is infinite,) that you may yet be recalled to a sense of your duty, and reclaimed by the power of Jesus from the dominion of corruption; but the chances, (and I make this declaration with a deep sense of responsibility,) the chances are ten thousand to one that you perish everlastingly! Look around you: how few of the veterans of the world and of sin do you find returning from their base and unholy pursuits! In general, they are conscious of a perpetually increasing aversion to the restraints of godliness; and although aware that sin has been to them a source of pain rather than of pleasure, they are unwilling to forego its poisonous fruit. They cling to their vile indulgences to the last; and even when incapable of actual participation, feast their polluted minds with the remembrance of former iniquities. No longer able to join in the drunken revel, the licentious debauch, many a wretched victim of vice and irreligion occupies himself in scattering the seeds of vice and impiety among the young, and displays a mad and preposterous zeal in reducing others to his own level of pollution, degradation, and misery. My young friends, if you desire to escape the

sad destiny of hardened and hopeless impenitence, begin at once to serve your God;—let the first fruits of your affections be offered on his altar;—in all your ways remember him: and he will lead you in safety through the changes and temptations of the world; he will give you strength to lay hold on the blessed prize of the gospel; he will cause you to feel an increasing pleasure in the exercises of religion, and will finally conduct you to the bosom of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. If you seek religion now, you will assuredly find her. You are yet untainted with the enormous vices and impieties which accumulate guilt upon the heads of the unconverted in their riper years; your hearts have not yet been rendered insensible by long intercourse with the world; your moral discernment is not yet blunted by habitual familiarity with iniquity: yield, then, to the arguments of reason and the strivings of grace; behold, and acknowledge the beauty and fitness of the great scheme of redemption; accept the atonement, rely upon the Intercessor whom God has provided for you; set your affections, and fix your thoughts upon him who has redeemed you from death; He is able to subdue your enmity to God, and to extirpate every propensity which impels you to wander from the ways of piety and virtue. Without *Christ*, you must all perish. You cannot see life, except through faith in his blood. As his ambassador, I entreat you to be reconciled unto God. And blessed be the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, I am authorized to address every one of you, even those who may have long resisted the Spirit of God and despised the obligations of religion. Repentance is yet possible. Come to the fountain open for sin and uncleanness. If you apply to Jesus as weary and heavy laden penitents, he will yet give you rest. Confess your sinfulness; confide in his power and goodness; seek the enlightening and purifying influence of his Spirit, and you will yet be enabled to work out your salvation, you will soon experience the comfortable assurance of Divine forgiveness; and when the grave receives your mortal remains, your spirit will rest in hope, and partake the rapturous foretaste of the joy and felicity to be revealed after the judgment of the great day.